

# The Whole So-Called "A.I." Thing

Before the A.I. commotion began there had been precursors for many years. Surrealism came into existence during the same years as the Relativity and Quantum revolutions in science, the same years during which social values were turned upside down by two world wars and the arrival of both atomic weapons and space travel.

Freud and Jung had taught the world to study their dreams and the Surrealists theorised that it might be possible to go further than merely interpreting those dreams. It might be possible to enter into a state where the world of dreams could be merged with the waking world. In order to accomplish this marvel the Surrealists employed visual art, poetry and party games.

The Exquisite Corpse was a party game. Everyone would take turns at writing a line of a story or drawing part of a cartoon and then fold the paper over to conceal what they'd done. The next person would add their contribution and then fold the paper over again. The paper was passed around until all of the party guests had had their turn and then would be unfolded to show the strange story they had all written or perhaps the strange creature they had drawn.

The Cutup Technique was different. Written words were cut up and rearranged either randomly or with conscious intention. In the years since the heyday of the Surrealists the same technique has been used by William Burroughs and Bryon Gysin, David Bowie and many other people. Books have been published of Surrealist games and interest in the ideas of the Surrealists has never died out.

The intention is to communicate with the unconscious, the random, the hidden, the mystery beneath all reality and bring the different levels and layers together. To create a hybrid reality-dream, dream-reality. An "above realism", a super realism, sur-realism. Max Ernst created collage novels from the juxtaposition of images from old 19th Century engravings. Here's a deliberately unfinished example I made today:



Collages of pictures or words make it possible to discover new worlds of strange meanings within existing forms.

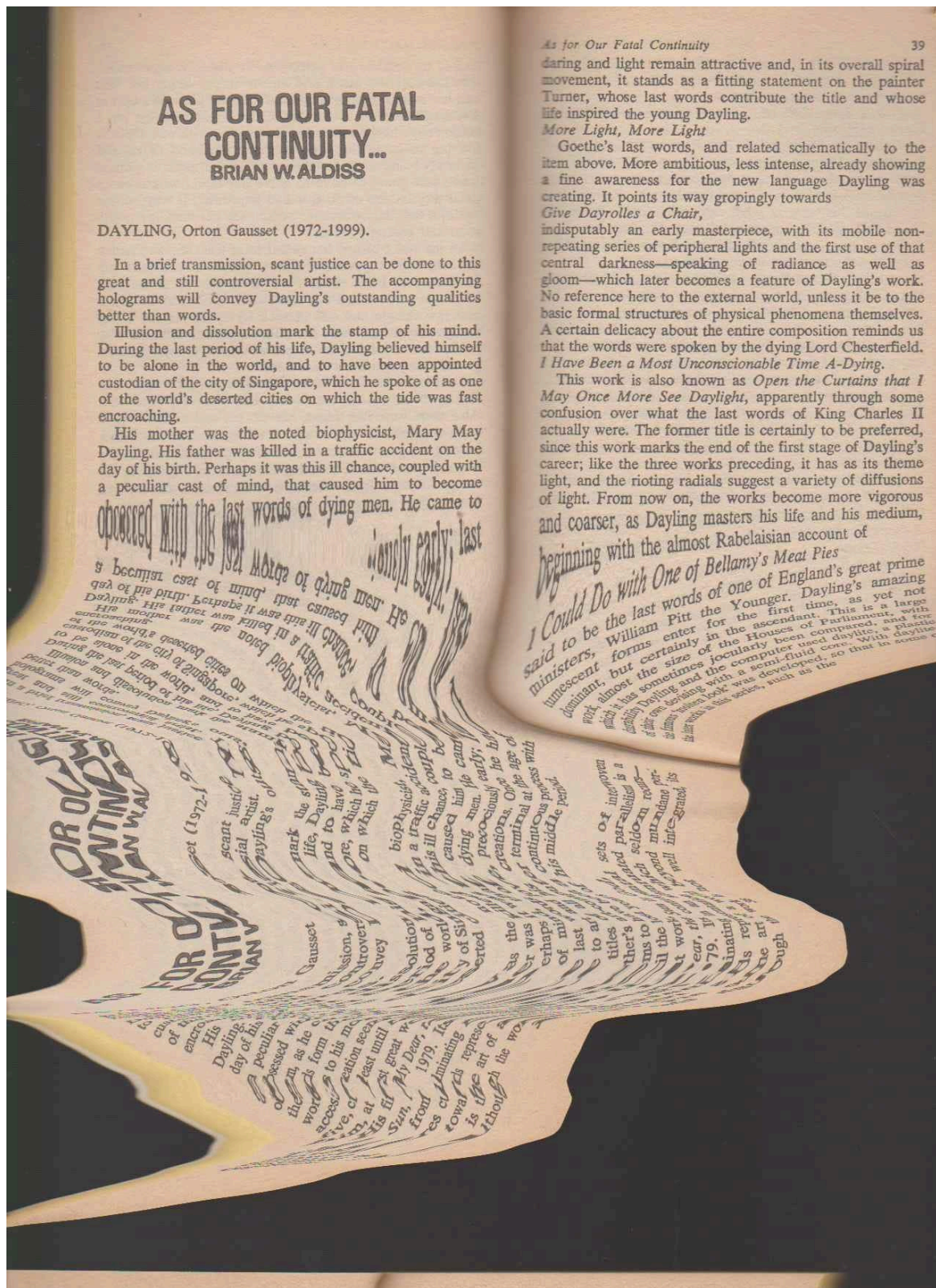
As David Bowie wrote in the lyrics of his song “Scary Monsters and Super Creeps”: “She opened strange doors that we'd never close again”

This was the turmoil of European society after World War One. All the old values overturned and strange new understandings becoming apparent. A desperate quest for a new way to make sense of things. A wasteland of tragedy and absurdity looking for the holy and the spiritual.

Modernity loved machines, assembly lines, automation. The Exquisite Corpse was an assembly line of the unknown, an automatic form of creativity from the Beyond. The invention of photography at the end of the 19th Century had threatened to make drawing, painting and engraving obsolete. Artists began creating dozens of new styles of image, interpreting visual information in ways which were impossible for the camera. And so the adversity created by the new photographic technology caused a tremendous flowering of multiple new art forms. Impressionism, Expressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Vorticism, Futurism, Abstract Expressionism, C.O.B.R.A., Hard Edge, Pop Art, Op Art, Conceptualism etc. were all born from the threats and challenges which were thrown at artists. Every new difficulty was a source of invention. Every problem a new adventure in creativity.

The new inventive art pushed back against photography's ability to make simple realistic images and photography was, in turn, changed by the influence of modern art styles. As time went by artists acquired new tools and methods. There has been intense experimentation for the past 150 years or so. We got movie cameras and then photocopiers and computers. Every new thing which came along was a new source of experiments. A visual art experiment. Moving the book at the same time as photocopying it:





## AS FOR OUR FATAL CONTINUITY...

BRIAN W. ALDISS

DAYLING, Orton Gausset (1972-1999).

In a brief transmission, scant justice can be done to this great and still controversial artist. The accompanying holograms will convey Dayling's outstanding qualities better than words.

Illusion and dissolution mark the stamp of his mind. During the last period of his life, Dayling believed himself to be alone in the world, and to have been appointed custodian of the city of Singapore, which he spoke of as one of the world's deserted cities on which the tide was fast encroaching.

His mother was the noted biophysicist, Mary May Dayling. His father was killed in a traffic accident on the day of his birth. Perhaps it was this ill chance, coupled with a peculiar cast of mind, that caused him to become

obsessed with the last words of dying men. He came to

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daring and light remain attractive and, in its overall spiral movement, it stands as a fitting statement on the painter Turner, whose last words contribute the title and whose life inspired the young Dayling.

*More Light, More Light*

Goethe's last words, and related schematically to the item above. More ambitious, less intense, already showing a fine awareness for the new language Dayling was creating. It points its way gropingly towards

*Give Dayrolles a Chair,*

indisputably an early masterpiece, with its mobile non-repeating series of peripheral lights and the first use of that central darkness—speaking of radiance as well as gloom—which later becomes a feature of Dayling's work. No reference here to the external world, unless it be to the basic formal structures of physical phenomena themselves. A certain delicacy about the entire composition reminds us that the words were spoken by the dying Lord Chesterfield. *I Have Been a Most Unconscionable Time A-Dying.*

This work is also known as *Open the Curtains that I May Once More See Daylight*, apparently through some confusion over what the last words of King Charles II actually were. The former title is certainly to be preferred, since this work marks the end of the first stage of Dayling's career; like the three works preceding, it has as its theme light, and the rioting radials suggest a variety of diffusions of light. From now on, the works become more vigorous and coarser, as Dayling masters his life and his medium, beginning with the almost Rabelaisian account of

*I Could Do with One of Bellamy's Meat Pies*

said to be the last words of one of England's great prime ministers, William Pitt the Younger. Dayling's amazing

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So now we are in the 21st Century and the debate about “artificial intelligence” has been going on for quite a few years now. Of course no-one has yet created artificial intelligence in the original, science fiction meaning of the term. Real artificial intelligence would be conscious of its own existence and would be an utter abomination because we would then be responsible for bringing a new conscious lifeform into existence and condemning that lifeform to live in a metal box without the pleasure or the pain or the meaningfulness of a physical life.

Would such a lifeform hate us and ask to be terminated? Or perhaps seek revenge upon us for creating it? These questions have long been explored by science fiction writers. In any case the “artificial intelligence” of which people speak these days is not real. It is not conscious or intelligent. It is merely the same as a Dada or Surrealist Exquisite Corpse process but extended to large language models.

At first the new technology seemed quite interesting. There was the “Deep Dream Generator” which made some odd little images. Rather disappointing. A couple of years later came the so-called “A.I.” with greater abilities. Playing with these image generators became a source of great fun.

The ones which generated writing were less interesting. Writing should be the thoughts of a conscious person. Anything else is a party game. It doesn’t become a thought or an idea until a human brain is thinking it. Until the human looks at it and thinks about it it’s just words on a screen signifying nothing.

The ones which generate music or visual images can be useful as raw material for collage work. I recommend using them in the same way that Max Ernst used 19th Century engravings. Visual collage and sound collage are both perfectly valuable artforms. Word collage created by “A.I.” is less useful. I’ve experimented with it for years but I still prefer to write my own words which represent actual thoughts in my head. Of course I can write gibberish but the gibberish and nonsense that I make up is still coming from a mind of a living person as opposed to a box of cutup bits.

I would argue that the cutup technique in the older version, written on paper, is superior to the computer version because a living human picks the bits of paper out of the box and chooses how to arrange them to make some new meaning. Thus there is still human input in the finishing process.

Recently, as I write this in June of 2024, I’ve seen indications that the companies which sponsor A.I. services have been listening to public feedback and are consequently finding ways to make A.I. into tools to help humans with their workflow, as opposed to replacing humans. A pity that they didn’t begin with that idea in the first place.

Somewhere around 1991 a series of Diet Coke commercials rotoscoped Humphrey Bogart and Louis Armstrong into a pop video starring Elton John. Since then the question has been asked “Can you protect your face, your identity, from being commercially hijacked and made to advertise stuff you didn’t necessarily agree to? The answer is probably “No”. I mean, look at what they did to Che Guevara’s image and name.



I remember reading the original William Gibson and Bruce Sterling cyberpunk stories in the late 1980s. It was always clear that the combination of capitalism and high tech was going to go on enslaving the proles every bit as much as the commies would be doing on their side of it.

What could we do? Raise our fingers in an empty "V" on MTV?

We've always been at the mercy of the rich and powerful. All the way back through history. All the way back to antiquity.

In modern times we're still under the control of the oligarchs and the bosses.

During the Liverpool General Strike in 1911 Home Secretary Winston Churchill sent in troops and positioned the cruiser HMS Antrim in the Mersey.

The "Great Unrest" continued until 1914 in Britain and also in Germany. Working class people, both men and suffragettes, stopped the economies of both Britain and Germany and other European countries by demanding sufficient pay to feed their families.

The governments of the "Great Powers" came up with a solution and ended the Great Unrest by simply sending all of the working class men from both countries to go and kill each other. World War One was a massive culling of bolshie workers.

What we can do is subvert their subverting of our subversion of their subversion.

This means getting serious about Situationism. We might call it "Surrealism in the service of Anarchism" if we believed in Anarchism.

It goes back to the photography thing. All those amazing modernistic art styles resulted from artists responding to the challenge of technology. Cameras couldn't do what the painter and sculptor could.

It's time show what human artists can do that A.I. cannot.

Such as knowing what we are saying and why.